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The Changing of Historic Place Names

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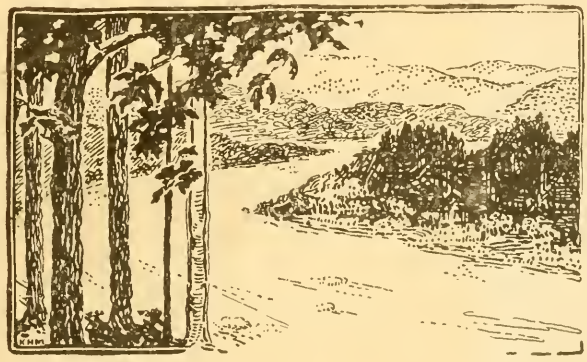

With an Introduction and Glossary of Some Historic Names Changed or Misspelled In Pennsylvania

By Henry W. Shoemaker

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"There are vicissitudes in all things."—Terence.

Prefatory Note

THE author wishes to state that this brief monograph is written at the suggestion of Col. Henry W. Shoemaker, who has not only assisted in the writing, but who also has kindly paid the expense of publication. The article could be extended very greatly. The author thinks, however, that enough is written to call attention to the evil of changing place names.

G. P. D.

Introduction

IT is indeed a privilege, through the agency of the Pennsylvania Alpine Club, to assist in the publication of so timely a monograph as that of Dr. Donehoo's, on the subject of changing historic place names. Every month the senseless shifting is going on, newcomers wresting from the historic past the heritage of honored names. It will be difficult a century hence to follow the course of history in Pennsylvania; even now it is hard to identify the places visited by early travelers like Spangenberg, Ettwein and Col. Weiser, as innovators have changed and re-changed even the names of the streams and mountains that they crossed. It will be hard to trace the racial and philological development of the State, as the haphazard system of renaming places destroys all historic sequence of nationality and individual tendencies. One bright spot remains. Pennsylvania has discarded fewer of her Indian names than most other States; personal vanity or prejudice was hardly strong enough to obliterate these—for even more than "their names are on the waters and you cannot blot them out," the Indian-named mountains, valleys, lakes, rivers and streams persist and bid fair to defy the ruthlessness of the ages. Let the constant watchfulness of every public-spirited Pennsylvanian be directed to "save the ancient landmarks" and keep inviolate the sturdy, distinctive nomenclature and spelling handed down by our forefathers.

HENRY W. SHOEMAKER.

"RESTLESS OAKS," MCELHATTAN, PA., APRIL 30, 1921.

JUN 14 1927

Changing Historic Place Names

THE Mosaic Law contained the following: "Cursed be he that removeth his neighbor's landmark: and all the people shall say, Amen."

They did not have a Historical Society during the early development of the Jewish Commonwealth, or Moses might have added to these wise regulations, "Cursed be he that changeth one of the historic names of towns and villages, and all the people shall say, Amen."

A place name is not only a landmark, but it is a historic landmark, often of more real value than the landmark of an individual occupant of the soil. Sometimes the whole history of a region can be dug up by the careful student of the names which are given to the towns, villages, streams and mountains in that region. Very few of the earlier place names in Pennsylvania were given in a haphazard way. They all meant something, and in most cases something of real historic value.

Some of these early names are most beautiful to hear, and some are not. But they are all of interest and historic value. Many of the most beautiful sounding names, and names of historic value, have disappeared entirely from the map of the state. Wyoming is an illustration of the disappearance of an old, beautiful and historic name. Many people think that the name "Wyoming" belongs to the state to which it migrated from the beautiful vale of Pennsylvania, where it was made historic for all time.

Some of the earliest place names now are applied to towns and topographical features far removed from the place which gave them birth. Shamokin is an illustration of this change. This name is one of the very oldest on the Susquehanna River, and it was used during the entire period of settlement, as well as

during the period of Indian occupancy, when the Vice-Gerent of the Iroquois Confederacy made it the Indian capitol of Pennsylvania. All of the early travelers and all of the official documents relating to Indian affairs use this name for the present Sunbury. The name Shamokin has been given to a town which is in no way connected with the historic town from which this name was taken. In order to avoid confusion, a historical writer now has to always refer to the old, historic place in this manner: "Shamokin (now Sunbury)." The same rule has to apply to the other historic village of Wyoming. When this place is mentioned, the statement must be made as "Wyoming (now Wilkes-Barre)." Probably the greatest crime of all is that which was committed by some classical school teacher in the change which was made from Tioga to Athens. The author in other publications has referred to the trail of the massacre of Indian place names by these classic school teachers from New England. It was one of the sad results of the Connecticut Settlement of Pennsylvania and Western New York. The Indian names were slaughtered without pity. The Scotch-Irish in Pennsylvania killed the Indians, but spared the names which the Indians had given to the rivers and mountains in the region in which they had lived. The New England school teacher slaughtered the names. Follow the trail of these classical scholars from Athens up into New York and you find a vertiable trail of blood of historic and beautiful Indian names.

Imagine, if you please, the following names within the historic habitat of the mighty Iroquois: Cato, Ovid, Camillus, Rome, Utica, Troy, Syracuse, Marathon, Ithaca, Geneva, Sempronius, Aurelius, Marcellus, Scipioville, Aurora, Romulus, Junius—and so on *ad nauseam*, there is hardly any limit to the list. The beautiful lake region of New York seems to have been the "Gettysburg" of the New England teacher, where the "high tide" of classical slaughter was done. By direct trail he reached the headwaters of the Susquehanna, where he killed Tioga in cold blood, and then erected "Athens." About this time the tide of Scotch-Irish and German "Pennamites" swept up the Susquehanna River and ended the advance of the classical scholar and prevented the continuation of the slaughter along the Susquehanna River.

I have always been thankful that this classic invasion of Pennsylvania soil did not come into the State by the way of the Allegheny River. Had it done so, the Ohio, or La Belle Riviere,

might probably have been re-baptized the "Styx," and the old twin towns at the headwaters of this stream called Romulus and Remus.

A "name" means something. It stands for the person or place. To the Israelite the name of the Deity was so sacred and awful that it was not pronounced at all. One of the Commandments relates to the taking of "the name in vain." We Americans are losing our spirit of reverence for almost everything. Names of places are changed without a feeling of loss. Sometimes these changes are due to the errors of clerks or map makers. There are so many illustrations of this method of change that only a few can be mentioned. Carter Camp, in Potter County, has been substituted for Cartee Camp—the name of a historic family, of which General Cartee was a member. One can easily see how this change was made by a copyist glancing at the name Cartee and then writing the more familiar "Carter." Another illustration of the same sort of error is found in the name "Queen's Run," which should be Quinn's Run —named for a famous early settler and Indian fighter who settled above Lock Haven, on the West Branch.

Col. Henry W. Shoemaker calls my attention to a few other changes of this sort. The Castleman River should be "Casselman," being named for a famous family of pioneers which settled in Western Pennsylvania. One of the townships in Clinton County is now named "Gallagher" instead of "Gallauher," in honor of Judge Abraham Gallauher. The recent maps of Pennsylvania are literally filled with such clerical errors, which finally have the authority of the United States Government to back them up, in the Geological Survey Maps and naming of Post Offices. These errors could all be avoided by having the proofs of maps and other official documents submitted to the County Historical Societies before final publication.

Other changes of names are intentional, as in the case of the many names, such as Athens, for Tioga Point; Sunbury, for Shamokin; Wilkes-Barre, for Wyoming. These changes were made so long ago that the more recent name has become historic. But changes are being made which have no historic significance whatever. One of the worst, which the author often thinks about because he remembers the place by its old name, is that of the large and growing town of Coraopolis, below Pittsburg, which formerly had the historic name of Vance Fort—which means something of the romantic period when the early settlers

on the Ohio had to fly to Vance's Fort for protection from the Indians. "Coraopolis" means nothing whatever. There are "opolis" without number in the United States. There was only one Vance Fort. The change of Venango to Franklin is another illustration of giving up an early and historic name.

Another change which Col. Shoemaker tells me of is the suggested change of Shousetown to Glenwillard. The Shouse family was one of the early pioneer families on the upper Ohio in the days when the male members of the family defended the frontiers of civilization. There are "glens" of every possible style and degree of fashion in the State, but there is only one Shousetown, or Shouse Ferry. Somehow, whenever a certain type of people move into a locality, it seems to be about the first thing which these modern pioneers think of, is that of changing a name, which does not have an up-to-date sound, to "glen"-something-or-other. Instead of cutting down trees, they cut down names. My very good friend Gifford Pinchot is a perfect friend of "forestry conservation," so is my other friend, Col. Henry W. Shoemaker—more power to both of them in their good work! Let us all start a movement for the "preservation and conservation of the historic place names of Pennsylvania." Some of these names are not as "pretty" as they might be, but they mean something, and they are historic. I know that Mary is a rather old-fashioned name for a girl, when compared with Gladys or Ethyl—but somehow the name means more. It has the historic light of ages playing about it. One thinks of deep-blue Syrian skies and the lakes of Killarney, and a lot of other things, when it is mentioned. So, Shousetown has a sort of crude sound when compared with "Glenwillard." But if you think of the sturdy frontiersman who ferried across the Ohio in the early days, the name becomes romantic. So also with the other names. If you know why they were given, you will realize why they should stay.

Another matter which calls for the attention of Historical Societies is that of giving names to places which never had a name. These names should have some meaning, either in local or state history. Oftentimes new towns are given names which bear no relation to anything in local or State history. Such names as "Mexico," "Arroyo," "Vera Cruz," etc., have no relation whatever to anything local or State. Many of these names are intrusive. They have historical significance elsewhere, but not here.

In view of these very brief remarks about Pennsylvania place

names, the author would suggest to the various Historical Societies in the State the passage of an Act of Assembly forbidding the giving of names to any place, or the changing of any place-name, without the authority of either the Historical Commission or of some other historical body, such as the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. The author understands that many European countries and some of our own States already have such laws. A person has the right to call his own country place or farm by whatever name he wishes. But State names of places become the property of the State, and become a part of the State's archives. Such a law would prevent the ignorant vandalism which has been so much in evidence in the past, in blotting out historic names, and it would also prevent the thoughtless and, oftentimes, utterly ridiculous bestowal of names.

There are hundreds of appropriate and beautiful historic names in early Pennsylvania history, among which are many really significant Indian names, which have never been given to any places or topographical features. These names, rather than meaningless ones, could be given to new towns and villages, and even to country places. Now is the fitting time for the Historical Societies of the State to commence a movement having in view the results mentioned in this article. Nearly every county in the State now has a Historical Society, or has such a society under way. This work can be made a most valuable part of the activity of such societies. The change of historic place names may seem a small matter, but it is not. Equally offensive is the mis-spelling of historic names, for it adds a studied indifference to the illustrious names or events in history, which no patriotic American should pass over lightly. We must hold to our historic place names as the tangible links in the chain of our historical development.

A Partial List of Historic Place Names Changed or Misspelled in Pennsylvania

(Compiled by Henry W. Shoemaker)

Old Name		New Name or Spelling
Louisbourg	Even the State Capitol was not spared!	Harris' Ferry, Harrisburg
Wyoming		Wilkes-Barre
Shamokin	"The Place of the Horns," where the deer performed their mewing.	Sunbury
Ohe-yu	"The Beautiful River—La Belle Riviere"	Allegheny River
Cartee Camp		New Bergen, "Carter" Camp
Shousetown	Sturdy Indian fighters, ancestors of Hon. Jouett Shouse, lived here.	Glenwillard
Muckelrat	How perfectly flat and inocuous the new name!	Woodland Hills
White's Eddy		Ritchie
Young Woman's Town	Here Mary Wolford, beautiful pioneer girl, was drowned escaping from Indians.	North Bend
Eyersburg		Bloomsburg
Longstown		New Berlin
Stroupstown		Freeburg
Swinefordstown	How inane the new name, compared to the old! Middle of what?	Middleburg
Christunn	Why this was changed is a puzzle, as new name has little special significance.	Middle Creek
Youngmanstown	There are no less than thirty other places called "Mifflin" in State, and Youngmanstown had a delicious West Country, Irish flavor!	Mifflinburg
Muhlenberg		Newton Hamilton
Messimersville		Sheridan
Dengler's		Mount Penn
Wessnersville	Stony Run really means nothing definite; State is full of them.	Stony Run
Quinn's Run		Queen's Run
Suedberg		Suedburg

Old Name		New Name
Reidersville		Newport
Peter's Camp		Blossburg
Parkinson's Ferry		Monongahela City / Monongahela
Casselman River.	This atrocity is gradually getting on all maps, even some of those of State Forestry Department.	Castleman River
Casselman		Castleman
Shireman's Creek		Sherman's Creek
Zerby		Sober
Gallauher (Township), Clinton County	Another victim of "Sinn Fein".	Gallagher
Tioga Point		Athens
Vance Fort		Coraopolis
Venango		Franklin
Shoemakertown		Ogontz
Kreamersville	A quaint old town re-baptized to please a local politician.	Smullton
Hamburg (Clinton Co.)		Mackeyville
Pittsburg	"H," in these days of simplified spelling, and after having been laid aside for nearly a century, tacked on by P. R. R. in 1902 to suit a resident Vice-President born in Edinburgh, pronounced Edinborough; which itself is philologically incorrect, the original name of the "Athens of the North" having been Edwins-burg, an early settlement of Angles, not Celts.	Pittsburgh
Brunerstown		Somerset
Bloody Run	Here immortal hero blood was shed. Why change it?	Everett
Bismarck	A victim of war hysteria and over-zealous "patriotism."	Quentin
Fort Hunter		Rockville
Siegfried		Northampton
Allenville	(Name changed twice)	Northampton / Allentown
Heidelberg	Hard to trace pioneer localities since these old names are nearly all gone.	Schaefferstown
Derry	With its old church, cruelly wiped off the map.	Hershey
High Head, (Mountain)	In Penn's Valley, Centre County. There are no less than 100 other mountains and hills in State called "Round Top."	Round Top

Old Name		New Name
Old Eagle		Strafford
Stucktown	A stalwart Indian fighter's name obliterated to make way for a stockholder in a new railroad through the town.	McClure
Dunnsburg		Dunnstown
Lewis' Lake	Why this sentimental, slushy new name?	"Eaglesmere"
Strasburg (York County)		Shrewsbury
Greersburg		Darlington
Exetertown	(Name changed twice)	Exeter Lorane
Saltzburg		Saltsburg
Anderson's Ferry		Marietta
Dekanoagah		Bainbridge
Kloster (Cloister)		Ephrata
Wright's Ferry		Wrightsville
Tiadaghton		Pine Creek
Karoondinha		John Penn's Creek Penn's Creek
Standing Stone Town		Huntingdon
Reinholds		Blainsport
Petersburg	Changed, as another town of same name in State.	Duncannon
Stover's	The name of old Reuben Stover, pioneer and hunter, deserved to be thus perpetuated. Why Livonia?	Livonia
Weirickstettle		Penn's Creek P.O. Centreville
Millersburg, (Berks County)	Changed owing to there being another Millersburg in State, but new name of no local significance.	Bethel
Allemingle	"All Wants," meaning "Land of Plenty." A very distinctive cognomen. New name of no local significance whatever.	Albany
Riviere Le Boeuf	"River of Buffaloes"	French Creek
Sinnemahoning	Changed by railroad. Indian name Sinne-Mahoning, or "Stony Lick."	Sinnamahoning
Nippeno	Another railroad infliction. Old name "Nippeno," from Nippe-nuse, an Indian Chief of the locality.	Nippono

Old Name		New Name
Manayunk		Schuylkill
Jaysburg	Changed so as to be the "soul mate" of Sunbury.	Newberry
Jacobsburg		Woodward
The Forks	A sturdy pioneer sounding name. Changed by railroad land agents to please an influential citizen of county.	Coburn
Panther Run	An abbreviation which destroys most of the local significance.	Panther
Hightown		White Deer
Littlestown		Bradford
Rattlesnake	Changed to "honor" a railroad contractor.	Whetham
Susquehanna	Changed on account of being other town of same name in State.	Nisbet
Riansares (Mountain)	On former domain of Queen Maria Christina of Spain. Named for her husband, the Duke of Riansares.	Penny Hill
Stavertown		Glen
Burgettstown		Langeloth
Reastown		Raystown, Bedford
Coryell's Ferry		New Hope
Quiggleville		Lycoming
Geulich, (Township) Clearfield County		Gulick
Benezet	Another railroad blunder in spelling. Named for Anthony Benezet, Quaker Abolitionist.	Benezette
Chatham's Run, (Hamlet)		Charlton
Barclay		Wyside
Paddy's Run	Here was a big camp of Irish railroad laborers when Sunbury and Erie Railroad was built about 1864.	East Renovo
Saltzman		East Ferney
Swatragh, (Stream)	Named by early Scotch-Irish pioneers for a brook in Derry, Ireland — Sewataro, Swetarrow.	Swatara
Powl's Creek	Pronounced Pole's Creek. Spelling should conform.	Powell's Creek

Old Name		New Name
Matawanna		McVeytown
Mingoville	Named for early tribe of redmen. New name given by owners of a picnic park.	Hecla Park
Hartley Hall	A regrettable abbreviation of Major-General Thomas Hartley's name.	Hartleton
Oak Grove	Changed because other town of same name in State.	Avis
Derrstown	An unaccountable substitution of first name of Lewis Derr, pioneer, for his last name.	Lewisburg
Stitestown	Named for the first settler in locality.	Lebanon
Paxtang	An obstinate blunder creeping like a canker into history, as original name was Peshtank!	Paxton
Funkstown		Altodale Mont Alto
Obold		Mount Pleasant
Rumberger		DuBois
Morgan's Gap		Bull Run Gap
Great Shawanese Lake		Ganoga Lake
Woodruffstown		Blockhouse Liberty
Watsonburg		Watsontown
Upland	An early Swedish settlement	Chester
Boyersville		Mazeppa
Green Castle		Greencastle
Adamsburg		Beaver Springs
Moose's Pond		Mose's Pond
Chinkalacamoose	"Meeting place of the Moose"	Clearfield
Straus		Schuyler
Zermatt		Holstein
Germantown Junction		North Philadelphia
Georgetown	Changed by Railroad Company, which had another station of same name. New name sounds nice, but of no local significance.	Dalmatia
Kishekokelas		Kishacoquillas
Jamesburg		Oriole
Swartztown		Milton
Cameronia		Montandon

The Spirit of the Name-Vandal!

Exit Muckelrat and Enter Woodland Hills

Muckelrat is gone forever, the "Village of Woodland Hills" takes its place and every citizen holds his head erect these days and smiles a happy smile.

The territory comprising the one-time Muckelrat includes that part of Wilkins Township, bounded by Braddock road, Filmore road, Glasgow road, Fairview avenue and Ridge avenue.

The formal announcement of this change was made in a communication to The Sun today, signed "Citizens of Woodland Hills."—PITTSBURG SUN, 1921.

Changing the Face of History

There is another aspect of the ruthless spirit of the day which holds nothing of the past sacred and secure. That is the modernization of Civil War memorials. Most of these erected thirty years ago, instead of showing the rugged, long-haired, bearded, loosely clad soldier of Civil War times represented the "Civil War" warrior to look like the trim National Guardsman of the Nineties, with short hair, curled mustache, and tight-fitting uniform. Those erected recently, take, for example, the Bucktail monument at Driftwood, and the Union League Club Regiment monument at Philadelphia, represent the Civil War soldier as short haired and clean shaven. The typical Civil War soldier was neither of these, even if a few shaved their whole faces once in six weeks. All let their hair stay long; that was part of the tradition of the war, while most of the boys allowed their beards to grow and have never shaved them off to this day. The short-haired, clean-shaved Civil War soldier never existed outside of the careless imagination of modern sculptors, and in only a single monument at Gettysburg Battlefield is the real soldier of the period depicted, that sole exception being in the bronze figure on the monument of the Fifth Minnesota Regiment. Even Violet Oakley has fallen into the popular error with her Lincoln and Meade murals in the Senate Chamber at Harrisburg, but she goes most artists one better by giving her clean-shaven soldier boys "Dutch cuts," from which their locks were as free as their cheeks were of the razor. Why can't real Civil War soldiers be put on these monuments, and not faces and costumes typical of 1915-1921—a crime in the eyes of historic exactitude. The Civil War soldier, South as well as North, was a Poilu, and the razor applied by sculptors half a century later has stripped him of one of his principal claims to individuality. As the noted French author, Maurice Barres, remarked, in speaking of the hairy French soldiers of the World War, "Their beards have been part of the war, and of our courage." The bearded Civil War soldier bespoke his period, and told the story of camp and campaign, and any

attempt to change him now makes the memorials historically ineffective. This is a phase of monument construction for our able State Art Commission to consider in co-operation with Dr. Donehoo's Historical Commission. Clean-shaved Civil War soldiers are as historically out of place as if the typical American "Doughboy" of the World War were put on a pedestal with Lord Rocksavage side-whiskers or Lord Fauntleroy tresses. Let us be correct and exact in every detail, if we are to build for the ages to come!

H. W. S.

Pennsylvania Alpine Club

THE CREED: To protect, study and preserve, wherever possible, the history, folk lore, folk songs and proverbs of our mountain people. To preserve historic place names and their rightful spelling, Indian traditions and Indian names. To secure the Pennsylvania Mountains a wider popularity and appreciation. To work for pure air, pure water, pure manhood and womanhood against the inroads of the modern complex, urban civilization. To save the ancient landmarks, such as old forts and other pioneer structures and memorials, and historic and noteworthy trees and groves. To create a sentiment for the education and moral encouragement of the Pennsylvania mountain children, neglected in favor of the children of the Kentucky and Tennessee mountains. To stand at all times for the American Flag and Pennsylvania Beautiful.

For the establishment of new Chapters and membership, apply to J. Herbert Walker, Secretary and Historian, Box 328, Scranton Pa. Program of Spring and Fall Outings on Application.

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